

The Komarov Botanical Institute, 250 Years of Russian Research. By STANWYN G. SHETLER. xiv + 240 pp., illus. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 1967. \$5.95.

In recent decades biologists have largely relegated the art of biological historiography to historians. The result is that accounts of the development of biological ideas and institutions show insights into the cultural and political milieu, but often lack perspective when considering the biological Zeitgeist of the period or events covered. Therefore it is refreshing that a botanist has written a balanced and interesting account of the evolution of one of the world's largest and most prominent botanical institutions—the Komarov Botanical Institute in Leningrad. Most American systematists are aware that such an institute exists, know that it probably has the largest herbarium in the world, but would be hard-pressed to continue discussion beyond this point. Stanwyn Shetler's comprehensive treatment of the 250-year history of the institute will alleviate our collective gaps in knowledge of this important center of taxonomic and floristic research.

The first part of the book deals with the establishment of St. Petersburg and its transition into modern Leningrad, a city which provides frustration as well as delight to a tourist. The second part of the book concerns the development of the Imperial Botanic Garden in St. Petersburg and the Botanical Museum of the Academy of Sciences. The botanic garden eventually came under the aegis of the Academy of Sciences and in 1931 it was decided that the two organizations should be united as the Botanical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. In 1940, the Botanical Institute was named after V. L. Komarov, a distinguished botanist who organized the monumental Flora SSSR project which was completed in 1964. At present, the institute has a "staff of 700, two dozen major laboratories, a large greenhouse and outdoor garden complex, an arboretum-park, several experimental farms, a 450,000-volume library, and combined herbaria of nearly 6 million specimens"! Administratively, the Institute consists of departments of Vascular Plants (headed by Armen Takhtajan); Cryptogamic Plants (M. M. Hollerbach); Geobotany (B. A. Tikhomirov—whom some readers may know personally since he was a relatively communicative attendee at two recent International Botanical congresses); Plant Resources (Economic Plants [A. A. Federov]); Evolutionary Morphology (M. S. Yakovlev); Botanic Garden (N. A. Avrorin); Botanical Museum (F. Kh. Bakhteev); and two physiological-biochemical departments: Photosynthesis and Microelements. Thus, the massive staff and facilities of the Institute are largely devoted to systematic studies; such concentrated resources are unparalleled in the western world. The third and final part of the book is a summary of previous chapters and also discusses the future of the Institute. The latest Five-Year Plan for the Institute calls for continuation of present efforts in floristics, systematics, and geobotany (which in current Russian usage "refers to the general study of *vegetation*—its origin, development, distribution, and utilization (especially).") With the revival of Mendelian genetics in the Soviet Union it seems likely that bio-systematic studies will resume as well. In the international field, the Institute anticipates a strong role in the International Biological Program, and Shetler suggests that the Russians may initiate intensive studies in the tropics. He adds that "because much exploratory research on the tropics must necessarily proceed along classical lines, Soviet botany may actually be in a better posture today for tropical studies than American botany, owing to the stronger persistence of classical methodology and greater sympathy for herbaria in the USSR."

Shetler's book is lucid and straightforward; it is well illustrated with scenes of Leningrad, of the Institute, and most valuably, of the principal present and past staff members of the Institute. Its parallel usage of Cyrillic and Roman characters for Russian words and names will enhance the utility of the book for librarians and bibliographers. I cannot predict how this study will be received by the Russians, but it is a dispassionate and comprehensive presentation which is most welcome to us in the West.—ROBERT ORNDUFF, University of California, Berkeley.